

PART ONE – Suggestions

The advice and suggestions presented here have been compiled by people who worked on the **Insight in Mind** film project, either in the making of the film and the original booklet or on its subsequent development as a DVD and website resources.

We would like to emphasize that this advice and the suggestions presented here are based on personal experience. They have been suggested from those who experience highs or lows of mood themselves or by friends or loved ones of people who have these experiences

The suggestions are not intended to be authoritative but to promote discussion and to encourage others to share their experiences.

We hope some people will find some of these contributions helpful. We do welcome feedback and ideas for future additions or changes to these suggestions. We would like to thank Making Waves for feedback.

For the sake of simplicity we discuss moods simply in terms of high, low and stable moods.

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1 – SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES

1.1 Running into stressful times

Learn to recognise what are the stressful times for the affected person. Deadlines, bad news, holidays, seasonal changes are all 'classic' mood triggers.

If you can become more aware of the individuals symptoms leading up to the high, then it may be easier to approach the person at a stage when they can take on board your concerns.

Try to anticipate stressful situations and discuss these with the affected person. Perhaps together look at helping plan to avoid or help make them less stressful. Try to be sensitive, yet supportive, during these times

If someone is being adversely affected by stress, try to discuss this sooner rather than later. It is important to identify stresses when they occur, rather than waiting for stresses to accumulate into a potential crisis.

Don't forget your own needs and your own sense of reality. Look after yourself as you can easily become caught up in someone else's crisis.

1.2 Sharing insight

If the affected person is not aware of their change in mood it may be useful to remind them of their usual warning signs and trigger situations and any coping strategies they might have preplanned.

Nobody likes to be told they are getting things out of proportion. Try to find a 'no blame' way of discussing the issue of a mood swing.

Try to agree a response to severe mood changes and pre-plan strategies for dealing with them.

If person has abruptly stopped their medication it may be useful to remind them gently of possible issues that they may face or remind them of their last acute episode and any disruptions.

1.3 Your friend or loved one is approaching a high

Encourage them to have early nights and enough sleep.

Encourage them to eat regular meals.

Encourage them to take frequent breaks from work and balance their activities.

Encourage them to swap busy activities for more restful ones.

Help them to avoid frantic situations and activities.

Help to keep the space calm and quiet.

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1.4 Your friend or loved one is experiencing a high

Encourage the affected person to get professional help. If it is not their first episode, have an agreed “crisis plan” so that calling on professional help will be less of an issue.

Remind the person that seeking professional assistance at an early stage does not necessarily mean that they will be asked to go into hospital, or treated aggressively.

Encourage them to ask for support or advice from any friends or people that they know who have has similar experiences who they may feel safe talking to.

Remember that the affected person is not entirely themselves. They may say or do hurtful things. They may get more angry or frustrated over things.

Try to deal with the situation sensibly and reserve judgments for a later date. The person may say things that aren't remembered afterwards.

When in doubt assume that it is the mood swings that are responsible for out of character behavior. Take actions that have been agreed during periods of stable mood.

Try not to make drastic, life changing decisions until things have settled down and gently discourage the person from making major decisions.

Avoid controversy or verbal disputes. Try to remain impartial. A person's mood can be inflated by stimulating emotions. Be consistent and clear in your conversation and actions.

Draw on your own support systems. Friends, family, especially friends who might also have experience of mood swings. Someone else to talk to about your feelings, outside of the caring role can be helpful.

Sometimes a very high mood can cause things to become out of place, and seem like the person is living in chaos. This is not necessarily a problem, and tidying up can be left until a later date. With experience and understanding the mess can be kept to a minimum.

1.5 Your friend or loved one is approaching a low

Ask the person to tell you (if they can) when they're going low.

Give gentle encouragement to plan their days. Give gentle motivation to finish things, rather than start lots of things.

Let them come up with their own ideas for activities that they feel would engage them.

Short periods of activity can be very good. 15 minutes of washing up, or of potting plants can break up the day nicely. Remind the person that if they do 15 minutes of activity, they will feel relaxed when they sit down afterwards.

Encourage the affected person to meet up with friends who won't mind if they are a bit flat.

Try not to take your loved one's low mood to heart. It is a product of their low mood, not a reflection on you.

Encourage them to ask for space when needed

Try to help keep the space calm/quiet.

Encourage positive thoughts.

Help and reassure the person in breaking down large problems into smaller ones. If the person has to make important decisions, help the person to see what options may be open to them for a given problem, and that deciding to put off making any decision is an option.

1.6 Your friend or loved one is experiencing a low

Draw on past experience. Reassure the sufferer that their low mood will not go on for ever.

Try to be understanding and supportive without expectations or a need for explanations.

Physical comfort and warmth can help, (but try to avoid crowding/try to gauge when it is needed)

Don't take over and run everything.

Let the person who is experiencing a low mood do what they can do. How much they can do, can vary from day to day and from morning to evening.

Don't immediately take every task, problem and responsibility off the person without giving them an opportunity to best support themselves first.

Help with occupying time, cooking, kitchen work, and other daily tasks.

Change social commitments if they seem too demanding. Don't let the person feel uncomfortable about canceling or changing plans.

Encourage the sufferer to take care of themselves and value themselves in many small and indirect ways. For example by eating well, taking exercise and by getting outdoors.

Suggest some healthy meal ideas or help with preparation. It can be helpful to read up or get information about nutritional or vitamins that might help and discuss or give help with buying them.

Give gentle encouragement and reassurance to do something physical, no matter how insignificant.

Help them to take part in calming/relaxing activities that they might have enjoyed in the past.

During a low there may be problems with sleep. Try to encourage a stable pattern of sleeping. Not too much or too little.

Sometimes the person really does need to rest. This is okay. Forcing the person to be active is not always the best policy. (If they were high first, it may have been exhausting). Sometimes they just need time to pass before being gently encouraged to do things again.

1.7 During an extended Low

The person may need to put themselves first. Try to respect their needs and allow them to be selfish at times.

Be conscious of the fact that some people want to actively withdraw, and cope alone yet others might want people around.

It is a natural reaction to talk to cover up silences. However, the silence is sometimes needed to allow the person time to share what they are able to say. Be aware that they're thinking might be slower than yours.

Surprises aren't necessarily nice! The affected person might simply not be able to enjoy 'something to cheer them up' at that moment.

It is most important that the person is reminded that someone else is there and cares for them.

The person may not always need comforting when you think they do.

Try to understand that the person may not always be able to show you that they care. Try to understand that this isn't a rejection of you.

You have to remind people in a extended low mood that they have come through this before and that things will get better.

Someone who is very depressed can be negative about anything and everything. They can be more narrow-minded, self-centred and anxious than normal. They may find it difficult to focus on anything other than their own feelings Try not to take their current attitudes to heart. Wait until things improve before taking important decisions about relationships, or future plans.

Periods of low mood can be described as “ an inability to feel good about things”, so people can sometimes focus only on negative aspects. Try to bear in mind that feeling positive takes a lot of effort from the person, and that this can be draining in itself.

Don't wait forever for a persistent low to lift. Encourage the person to seek professional help.

1.8 A Low Directly Following a High

Remember that any physical disarray/ mess after a high can be difficult for the person to sort out. It can serve as a daily reminder of the high and cause many unpleasant feelings and may contribute to any negative feelings of self worth. The mess along with any other feelings of remorse can be helping to contribute to the low mood.

It may be helpful to be by their side when they are ready to deal with these things or help to break it down into manageable amounts. Often, simply just giving company and support can help.

The aftermath of a disruptive high can sometimes all seem too much to deal with. Encourage the person to take one thing a time and rebuild and repair things in a step by step way.

A steady sequence of small positive steps is better than dramatic all-or-nothing solutions.

Confidence has to be rebuilt from a very low starting point. Build on past experience. 'You did it before, you can do it again.'

2 SOME SELF-HELP SUGGESTIONS

2.1 You are becoming high

Keep a 'list' of things that you find relaxing or that calm you down for times when you feel speedy.

If you know you are becoming high but you think you can handle it, try to recall that in the past things have quickly ran out of control. This time err on the side of caution.

You have to decide how much speediness you are prepared to tolerate. Don't risk losing insight. Discuss what's happening to you, don't keep it to yourself. Get professional help if necessary.

Watch out for things that seem to speed you up. Risk-taking activities are top of most people's list, along with intense socialising, going without sleep and giving in to sudden impulses.

Some people find that spending less time going out & meeting up with people is helpful.

If something is a good idea now then it will be a good idea tomorrow and in a weeks time. Good ideas don't evaporate. You don't have to scribble everything down or rush around being busy.

Keep a diary or "mood journal" about your mood swings, the stressors that trigger them and the kinds of counter-measures that seem to work.

2.2 You are high

You have to make a decision between the short-term benefits of your high and the medium term benefits of stability. It is not too late to slow things down.

Try to stop doing activities and slow down. Some people find it helpful to cancel plans, avoid the phone and take time out for themselves.

Tell you friends or loved ones if you are worried that you are going too high. Get professional help.

Seek support from those close to you; friends or those who have had similar experiences, as well as help from any support networks you may have.

Remember that what can begin as a positive euphoric experience can end very unpleasantly. Remember the negative side of highs: frightening delusions and hallucinations, fear to your loved ones and weeks on heavy medication.

You may rightly feel that you have good ideas and a positive contribution to make. But you can't put plans into practice unless you are well for extended periods of time. Going with your high again isn't going to help you get things done in the longer term.

2.3 You are becoming low

Keep a 'list' of things that seem to help when you are low.

If doing anything at all seems too big a task (overwhelming) then break tasks into small manageable bits and take satisfaction in what you manage to do.

Try not to worry if your memory feels poor or if you have problems concentrating. These things tend to improve again as your mood picks up.

Look after yourself. Try to eat good food and get outdoors. Get a little exercise.

Don't ignore other health or social problems (such as housing or finances) you might have, and if you have any physical health problems, try and deal with these.

Some people find it useful to cut down on caffeine, drink plenty of water and take nutritional supplements and vitamins.

Don't start the day with nothing planned. If you are low, expect that you might start the next day low. Plan the next morning as it may help to get yourself going.

Avoid media that reinforces your negative mood or makes you anxious. We can't always feel strong enough to deal with everything that's reported in the News.

Keep trying different activities. It's better to leave early on those occasions when you are just not up to it.

Just doing things can bump-start your mood. Don't stop trying to bump-start your mood.

2.3 You are Low

Having things to do, no matter how small may be helpful.

Music may help soothe and relax you.

Try to establish some kind of daily or weekly routine, no matter how insignificant it may seem.

Avoid stressful people and situations.

Find something meaningful to spend your time doing. It may be something small at first, like doing a crossword or gardening – it could be any activity that you may find enjoyable.

If a particular issue or a number of decisions are contributing to the low mood, try and find someone who you can talk them through with.

Sometimes, if you talk about issues with someone who just listens, you often find the solution yourself. It is the process of talking about things which is helpful.

Stress can be removed from having someone to work through problems with or someone else being around can give you the encouragement to deal with certain issues or activities more easily.

Don't just put up with a persistent low mood. Treat it as a problem that you can deal with. Get professional help if necessary.

3 – SOME SUGGESTIONS ABOUT MEDICATION AND TREATMENT

See links resource page for further information.

3.1 Medication for mood swings

Lithium, sodium valproate and carbamazepine are three commonly used medications prescribed to stabilise mood.

For further information on the characteristics of different drugs and possible short and long term side-effects, see links resource page.

People who are experiencing an acute high may be prescribed neuroleptic, otherwise known as anti-psychotic tranquillisers. These are prescribed to aid rest and prevent physical and mental exhaustion. Individuals respond differently to these powerful drugs. It is important to try and develop an informed approach to dealing with your highs with your doctor.

3.2 Some suggestions for friends and loved ones

It can help to find out as much as possible about medication and other forms of treatment such as talking therapies.

Medication doesn't simply control the person's mood swings mechanically. To get the best out of medicines and other treatments the person who experiences the mood swings has to learn to use these therapies intelligently themselves.

It is best if the person taking the medication can take responsibility for their medication and establish a straightforward routine for ordering prescriptions, taking medication and for getting blood tests done. This is better than having to keep remembering.

It is important to recognise that the person may find it oppressive to be constantly reminded to take medications or asked if they have taken it.

Although, at times of acute stress, it may be useful to offer to help organise a person's routine of medication, amounts or helping keep track of what's taken.

Agree to help or remind the person about medication if their routine seems to be at risk of breaking down.

If you don't think enough is being done for the person by their GP or consultant then agree to go to their next consultation with them. Get a clear idea what the rationale for treatment is, the timescales being worked to and when the treatment is going to be reviewed.

It is important that the person experiencing mood swings understands that these are their mood swings and they have the choice of treatment or learning to manage with lowered medication or managing without medication at all.

Give help and support with tasks made difficult by medication.

Try to be understanding of any frustrations felt by the person.

3.3 Some self-help suggestions

Coming down from a high doesn't have to be horrific. The sooner you start taking control of the situation, the smaller the come down.

Develop a good professional relationship with anyone who is involved with your medication such as your consultant, GP and pharmacist.

Find out as much as you can about the tablets you are taking and their side-effects.

It may be helpful to keep a written record of what you have taken and when.

If possible, try to be patient with the medications, how you might be feeling can pass. Explain to others how they make you feel so they can try to understand. But don't simply put up with unpleasant physical or emotional side-effects or stressful instability. You and your doctor should keep tweaking the medication.

Medications and research on medication are changing all the time. It can be sometimes be difficult to find the right medication at the right dose. No two patients are exactly the same.

Remember these drugs are affecting your mind and your mind is the basis of your identity as a person. It is up to you to find the right balance between your core personality, your mood swings and your treatment.

It is easy to resent having to take medicines.

If you are considering a change in medication or a change in dose, consult with your doctor first. Sometimes changing a medication regime can cause relapses, and needs careful thought from you, and professional advice from your doctor.

3.4 Taking medication long-term

Keep up to date with new ways of treating mood disorders including talking therapies such as CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy). Check out the self-help shelf at the local library and relevant websites.

Keep communicating about how you feel and about your treatment. Other people can't mind-read.

Evaluate how your treatment is going and discuss how life is going with friends and loved ones. Look at a year or two at a time. Ask yourself what you have been able to achieve and what time you have lost to the mood swings. Make sensible judgments about medication on the basis of the evidence. Don't just go on how you happen to be feeling today.

4 - ON BEING OKAY

4.1 Suggestions for friends and loved ones

On a steady regime people can remain stable for extended periods of time. Don't be surprised about this or show too much concern. Accept the benefits of stability.

Don't stop giving encouragement when the person has a good idea, don't immediately jump to the conclusion that they are high, likewise - don't automatically think that the person may be approaching a low if they want to stay in a lot or withdraw from activities

Although your experiences can be painful at times, try to put yourself in the other persons' shoes. It is easy for them to feel guilty, inadequate or foolish because of their mood swings.

We all have a stake in accepting highs and lows of mood as just another of life's challenges - one that can be approached and dealt with in a reasonable way.

Be aware that what a person may have been through may well change the way they look at their life and different things may become important. Priorities can change.

Allow the person to take up responsibilities and activities at their own pace and positively encourage the person to do their own thing.

4.2 Self help suggestions for Feeling okay

Some people may have more of a constant cycle to feeling high or low whereas for others there can be long periods of feeling ok, or remaining stable in between. On a good preventive regime you should not be excessively worried about going high or low. If you are often worried about going high contact your doctor and review your medication or seek some other support and help.

Try and make the most of stable periods.

If you are feeling okay and things are going well share that with your loved ones and friends. Don't just beaver away on your personal projects.

If there are key issues about relationships that keep coming up when you are a high or low try to addresses them with you partner, family etc. when you are well.

It can become second nature to become wary of yourself and keeping a mood diary can help

It can be helpful when you are feeling okay to make lists of ;

- Triggers to look out for and a list of how you can deal with these.
- Warning signs of an approaching high or low mood.
- Coping mechanisms that you could use. It may be important not to worry what others may think of any coping mechanisms you have – it is more important that they work for you.

Share these lists with those close to you. They may think of some that you have missed, or help you to see things from a different perspective.

It may be helpful to spend time sharing ideas and advice with others with similar experiences.

In time, it may be good to talk with others that have helped you through your experience to enable you to come to terms with what you have been through. It may be helpful to talk about how you want them to best support you on a practical and emotional level.

For further information, see section 5 suggestions on moving forward and links on links resource page.